

A
L E T T E R

O F

Weighty Concern

T O B E

R E A D & P O N D E R E D

By all that Love the

Truth & Peace.

Written by an Unknown AUTHOR,
as appears in that which follows.



Printed in the Year, 1679: ^{8¹/₆} 2 March.

THE
P R E F A C E
TO THE
R E A D E R.

THe Author of the ensuing Letter being to me unknown, and I to him (as by his lines appeareth:) The matter therein contained being of Weighty Concern, and that not only respecting the Persons mentioned therein; but many more being concerned in the same matter, and indeed, is that which may be of Use to all sorts of Protestant Christians in their differing apprehensions, to learn moderation towards each other, and to keep within the bounds of the Gospel-Spirit of Love and Peace: On these grounds, it was thought meet by some friends, to make it publick, the matter it concerns being not done in a Corner: And I heartily desire it may have a good effect. Nor will it (I suppose) offend the Author: 1. Because he allowed a liberty to communicate it to few, or many, as I please. 2. The matter being of Weighty Concern, it's that, of which he has no cause to be ashamed, and therefore not offended. So no more, but my desire that it may come to the Reader in the Blessing of the Lord, as I doubt not but it will to all that Love the Truth and Peace.

R17557
T. C.

The Author's Letter to T. C.

SIR,

Having met with that little Book, which is a Narrative of Mr. Kiffen, Mr. Coxe, and the other Brethren, their dealings with Thomas Collier: I was provoked thereby to some regret, and wrote my resentments thereupon, with an Eye to one of Mr. Coxe's Congregation, to whom I had thoughts to have sent it; but upon further thoughts, I judged it rather meet to present it to you, the person chiefly concerned and injured. If upon persusal you shall think it of Use to fewer or more persons, you may communicate it as you please. I am an utter stranger to you, as you to me; and that what I have written may receive no prejudice of any kind from my Name, I have chosen to subscribe my self,

London Oct.

11. 73.

Superfcribed.

To Mr. Thomas Collier
These.

Sir,

A hearty Friend to Truth, Love,
and Modesty, and to
your self.

J. W.

The Letter it self.

SIR,

IT seems to me a matter to be born, and looked upon with patience (as other Humane Infirmities) that conscientious men differ in their Sentiments of some parts of Religion, whilst they all agree in the common and essential Principles thereof, and especially in their love and respects one to another as Christians, though their differences hinder them from that intimacy and full Communion which is to be desired: Which yet gives them occasion for the exercise of forbearance, humility, self-denial, and search of the Truth, but when instead of these, they prosecute one another with Corporal Penalties and Forfeitures of outward Enjoyments, or with Censures, Opprobrious Language, Reproaches and Excommunications. This is a sad prospect, and as it is most contrary to Christianity, so it bodes ill to the Prosecutors, who according to Divine Government and Dispensation, even in this World, may expect to have the like measure meted to them; yea full pressed down and running over.

And by how-much the things Christians differ about, are more intricate and hard to be understood, or of less concernment to be deter-

mined, by so much the more are they faulty, who offend against the common and necessary Principles of *Love* and *Peace*, for the sake of such doubtful and obscure matters, especially in these times; after these things have been so much disputed and controverted, and the Principles of Love and Liberty so fully vindicated from the pretences of malevolent and designing men: and after that, those that plead for Love and Liberty, have been so often upbraided, as bearing a rigid mind toward Dissenters; wanting nothing but power and opportunity to confute their present Profession by a contrary practise.

Sir, That your Friends and Brethren, with whom you have Church Society, are the Persons guilty in these respects, will appear (I think) most manifest; if we may give credit to the inclosed Printed Narrative. Here we find Mr. *Collier* rejected, *i. e.* excommunicated for Heresie. 2. We have a Definition of Heresie. 3. The Application of this Definition to Mr. *Tho. Collier*. 4. The Persons that have taken upon them this Power. 5. The grounds of their Usurping this Power. Lastly, The manner of their proceeding.

1. As to Mr. *Colliers* person, all that I have heard of him is good, and if there had been any thing bad in his Conversation, I make no question but those that were so ready to impute to him so great a Crime as Heresie; would not have failed to have told the World, if he had been Guilty of any thing else that might aggravate his obnoxiousness to Censure; and Mr. *Coxe*, who so often reproaches him with want of understanding (which is seldom a fault; and when it is so, but of ignorance) would have catcht at any thing that might have the appearance of a known Vice.

Therefore I conclude, That *T. Col.* is at least, as good a man as either *W. Kiff*. *N. Coxe*, or any other of those that have condemned him; and his writings and reasonings shew, that he is a man well versd in Scripture; and his differing in expression from others that hold for substance the same Opinions, shews that he is not one of them that follow the common Track blind-fold; who say as others of reputation say, though they know not the meaning of what they say, or cannot clear it from inconsistencies. This is the man, the Baptized Brother, the Minister, one that has laboured for many years in Word and Doctrine, and is now an Old Man, both in Age and Faith: A Man no way inferiour to any of them that have cast him out; except that he has learnt to govern his passions better, and not to use such reproachful and contemptuous Language, as Mr. *Coxe*, who appears by his Writings to be a greater proficient in the School of Contumely. This is the man whom they have rejected or excommunicated for Heresie.

2. Now let us see what they call, or account for Heresie; Which
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the Fifteen Brethren, Messengers appointed by the Church at *London*, with others, define thus, ' He is an Heretick that chooseth an Opinion, ' by which some Fundamental Article of the Christian Religion is sub- ' verted; which Religion before he professeth, but now professeth in this ' Opinion contrary thereunto, notwithstanding proper means for his ' Conviction hath been made use of.

The Application of this to Mr. *Collier* is thus, ' T.C. hath professeth the ' Christian Religion, and doth still profess it; he hath chosen Opinions that ' doth subvert some fundamental Articles of Christian Religion, and ' are inconsistent, with-holding the Head; which are, 1. He asserts, that ' Christ is the Son of God, only as considered in both Natures. 2. He ' denies that the defilement of our Nature is our sin. 3. He asserts that ' none shall be eternally damned, but those that sin against the Holy ' Ghost, and that the term of some Sinners punishment may perhaps ' not exceed One hundred years.

That little which I shall say to this Definition of Heresie, and the application of it to T.C. amounts to this: 1. That the contrary to any of these Propositions is no where read expressly in Scripture, viz. 1. That Christ is the Son of God, as considered in the Divine Nature only. 2. That the defilement of our Nature is our sin. 3. That some shall be eternally damned who have not sinned against the Holy Ghost: That is (as Mr. *Col.* expounds it) are not finally impenitent under the Gospel. If these Propositions be no where expressly said in Scripture, then it follows, that the Scripture is so far from being clear and express in all Articles of Faith, that it is not so in the Fundamental Articles thereof, then which what has the Roman Synagogue said more Derogatory to the perspicuity and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures? What Protestant is he that holds any Article to be Fundamental and Essential to Christian Religion, which is not plainly and expressly set down in Scripture? So that Mr. *Kiffen* and his Brethren, have in this great Fundamental of Protestantism against Popery, deserted the Protestants, and fallen away to Popery.

2. If these be fundamental Articles, and cannot be found in Scripture, but must be drawn and inferr'd thence by consequence and reasonings that are very hard to be understood, as every one that reads Mr. *Collier*, and Mr. *Coxes* Books, must of necessity acknowledge, then it will be impossible for the greatest part of Mankind (nay even of the people of *England*, who have more means of knowledge than other people) to come to the certain knowledge and Faith of Fundamental Articles of Christian Religion; without which, they cannot be Christians: So by this means the far greatest part of Mankind, which is the Vulgar, are concluded in an incapacity of Christian Faith, and consequently of Salvation thereby.

3. If Mr. Collier be as good and sincere a man as Mr. K. or Mr. C. and Errs through weakness, as possibly they may do, then their proceeding against him in this manner, justifies the proceedings of all both Papists and dissenting Protestants, that have at any time presumed to condemn their brethren for Hereticks, upon account of such Errours as they did judge contrary to Fundamentals; but the condemned, could not by all the skill and industry, they were capable of, judge them to be such.

Thus by these mens practice and dealing with Mr. C. is the ground of the Dissentions, Quartels, Censures, Reproaches, Hatred and Envy (which are the shame of Christians and Scandal to Unbelievers) established, and as much as in them lies perpetuated.

The Pride, Arrogancy, and Uncharitableness of these men is manifestly discovered: For the difference between them and Mr. C. depends plainly upon this point, Whether they or he, is more accute, witty, learned, sagacious, or honest in the search and belief of Scripture? If they be neither more accomplished in their understandings, nor more honest and faithful than he, they have no ground for condemning him; therefore of necessity they must account themselves more learned and witty (as Mr. Coxe doth often reproach him to be less) and more honest in following their learned and well improved understandings, and that is the sole ground of condemning him.

But then I must appeal to all men that know them both, and that have read their writings, Whether there is any reason for this Arrogant Opinion of themselves, and Uncharitable Opinion of their brother, save meerly their own conceits?

They condemn him as one that has departed from some Essential part of Christianity, and consequently to be no Christian, how doth this appear? Why they judge that they have a better understanding, and are more cunning in drawing consequences from Scripture; and that either it is his duty to see as they see, and his sin not to see, what he cannot see (*for they suppose him, as perhaps not condemning himself in the present judgement of his conscience*, yet to be condemned by them; because they judge his present Opinions contrary to the Fundamentals of Christianity, which he formerly profest) or that he has not so much honesty as they have in professing what he sees and believes: Nay that he is come to so great a degree of wickedness, as to profess and teach contrary to what he believes. They could not condemn him, but upon one or both of these grounds that I have said, and how they could conclude either the one or the other, without exalting themselves beyond reason, and depressing him below Charity, I cannot conceive?

Oh the sad and lamentable Dissentions, Animosities, Wrath, Envy,

Envy, Bitterness, Reproach, Evil Speaking, and a multitude more of Calamities among Christians, especially those among Protestants, which in general proceed from this Ground: *For only from Pride cometh Contention.* Men persuade themselves they are Zealous for the Glory of God, the Honour of Scripture, and for Truth, when the truth is, they are zealous for their own Glory and Honour, and the Reputation of their Judgments. For alas, Are they not all Men? Have they not the same desire of Truth and Happiness one as another? Have they not like Passions and like Understandings? Do not the Protestants in general give the same Reverence and Credit to the Scriptures? Are there not as Learned Men on the one side as in the other? And for what appears, Are they not as Honest and Obedient to the undoubted Faith and Practice of Christians, one as another? God only judges the Heart: What is it then that makes the difference? Whence comes it, that the one must Rage against, Censure, and Condemn the other; and for the most part inflict as many Temporal Penalties upon him as are in his power? Whence comes these Wars and Fightings that are among Christians? come they not from their Lusts? Hath the one any thing that may capacitate him to judge the other, which the other cannot make as good a Title to as he? But indeed Pride and Arrogancy, can steel Men, that they seem to themselves to have so clear and distinct a Knowledge, and to be able to demonstrate the Truth so plainly and manifestly, that every one that does not see and judge as they do, is a most notorious Criminal, and to be prosecuted with Ecclesiastical and Secular Vengeance: when alas many times the Difference between these two Parties is a meer Logomachie or strife of words. They understand not one another; and I persuade myself whoever looks narrowly into Mr. Col. and Mr. Cox's Writings, they shall find they do for the most part, really agree, and so they find Expressions here and there, wherein they yield the matter in controversy one to another; but Pride will not suffer them to see, and Arrogance will have the weaker party to yield, and be subject to their determinations, and gives them Authority and Cause too, to condemn him if he refuse.

These men are pleased to define Heresie by the Notation of the word, as it is a coniugate of Choosing, and so every Doctrine that any man holds, be it true or false, be it a Choice upon good grounds or bad grounds, he has their genius of Heresie, but the difference is, *That Heresie is the Choosing of an Opinion that Subverts some part of Christian Faith.*

The Fundamentals and Essentials of Christian Faith, I hope are so plain and easie to be understood, that any Heathen may presently apprehend them, or else how shall he be guilty in rejecting Christianity,

if he do not understand it: but would it not be ridiculous folly to tell a Heathen that all things of Christianity, much more the Fundamentals, are plainly written in that great Book called the Bible; and yet afterward to tell him that some things not written there, and which Christians themselves cannot find there (though they have studied it 30. or 40. years very diligently) are also Essential to Christianity? Would not a man be afraid of Christianity upon these Terms?

But when he shall see that Christians between whom he can find no difference in respect of any Ability or Honesty, that may make them capable of judging and condemning one another, yet to judge and condemn one another and disown them for Christians, and treat them for very wicked Choosers, upon the account of such Points; will not this Heathen say that Christians are raging mad; as well as foolish? that they want humanity as well as discretion; and cry out, as another Heathen once did, *Sit Anima mea cum Philosophis: Let my soul take its portion among Philosophers?* Let Christians take their course, I am sure, may he say, they are wicked Choosers, with a witness, that arrogate to themselves such a power over their Equals, and deal so brutishly with their Brethren upon account of such Arrogancy.

But here Sir I am well aware, your Brethren (as all other Arrogant Prosecutors do) will cry out, What? Shall not Christian Churches exercise Discipline among themselves? Must they suffer their members to vent what Doctrine they please, what their Pride, Singularity, and Ambition, or other lust leads them to, though to the subversion of Christianity, the reproach of their Churches, the scandal of those without, and disturbance of those within? And must they not Exercise against them that Authority, Christ left his Churches, of Rejecting and Excommunicating such Hereticks after the first and second Admonition? We shall be partakers of their sin and the mischiefs that attend it, if we do not use our utmost power against such. God knows, we are heartily sorry and grieved, that we have any such occasion given us, but when it is given, we would do what we can to clear our selves of the guilt and prevent the evils that follow such enormities.

I Answer, and has not this been the cry, and these the defences that Arrogant Censurers have and do make for their Uncharitableness? Who is it that sees not that these pleas have been taken up in Justification of bad Causes? Far be it from me to speak a word against that Discipline that is for Edification; and Promotion of Truth and Peace, and Love, but when I see peace, and love destroyed, hatred and dissention increased and advanced in their places, under pretence of Christian Discipline, surely its fit the condemning party should be able to shew some better evidence than the condemned can: but in this and a Thousand more such

such Cases, I find no such matter, nor any ground of Preheminence (save that of Pride) which renders the Judge his Cause more just than that of the condemned.

Thence it comes to pass, that when the condemned party gets number and power, he does with as much Justice condemn his Judge, and with more applause, as having been first injured. I know very well, that in every Society, there must be Order and Judgment, Admission and Exclusion of members, but then those Judgments are grounded upon such plain, and evident Rules and Reasons, as any impartial man may see the Justice and necessity of the proceeding, and not upon Criticisms of Wit, or perhaps a conceit of Wit and Honesty in the Judge, which no mortal that is unprejudiced, can see any Tollerable ground for. If we should but peep a little into the Merits of the Cause before us, this would presently appear; as for instance, Mr. Coll. is condemned for a Heretick, because he asserts that Christ is the Son of God only, as considered in both Natures: Now to prove this an Heretical Opinion, Mr. Cox out of many clear Texts, picks out two, which he thinks most clear, viz. *Psal. 33. 8, &c. By the Word of the Lord were the Heavens made;* and *Prov. 8. 22, &c. Where Wisdom is said to be brought forth and set up from Everlasting.* I pray now any impartial Man, how these Texts do clearly prove Christ to be the Son of God, as considered in one Nature only. When First, Neither Christ nor the Son of God is so much as mentioned in either of them. Secondly, Both these Texts are understood by divers Learned Interpreters, that are of Mr. Coxes Opinion in the point, not to intend Christ at all.

3. If they should be understood of Christ the Son, still Mr. Coxes Doctrine is not proved against Mr. Col. for he grants the Divine Son-ship, but not without the consideration of the Humanity. And, Fourthly, If they did clearly prove Mr. Coxes Doctrine, that Christ is the Son of God, considered only in the Divine Nature, yet when all is done, there is not the least pretence from these Texts of this Doctrine, its being a Fundamental of Christian Religion, neither is there the least reason imaginable, why it should: for it's barely speculative concerning the time past, or Eternity; *A parte ante*, as they call it: and both parties do now, hold Christ to be the only begotten Son of God born of the Virgin Mary.

Now if this Coxian Doctrine be clearly proved to be a Fundamental by these Scriptures, then those that interpret them otherwise, will be all almost Hereticks; and after they have read Mr. Coxes book once or twice for their Admonition, will go near to deserve rejection out of all Christian Society: for if one may without deserving such a Censure, otherwise expound the plainest Texts; much more those that are more obscure: and he may be said in a sense to subvert the Foundation, that takes away the main Pillars, and leaves only those that are more weak and infirme.

But to our Men of Discipline, the Roman Usurpers did for many Ages, exercise Discipline to the satisfaction of their lusts of glory, riches and dominion, and how close do these lusts stick to the reformed and refined? The Baptizers (or Dippers) are not free from them, they that have not abilities or opportunities to domineer over a Kingdom, aspire to it in a City, and they that cannot Lord it in a City, will take up with a Town or Village. But it seems to be no narrow Province that Mr. K. Mr. Cox and the rest of their Society aime at; for this Narrative tells us, that *Walter Pen*, one of the Commissionated Brethren, said, *The Church at London was the representative of all the Churches in the Nation.* The Parliament or Supreme Court of all the Baptists, a pretty large Dominion, usurped and exercised with great Modesty, Piety, and Charity. You have heard the charge or crime, and that a great and Notorious one, to wit of Heresie, of which Mr. Col. has been duly convicted, for he has been admonished once and again, and yet will not recant; but persists in his Heresie and maintains it. *That (say they) denominates a Man to be an Heretick that he persists in his Heresie after proper means have been used for his Conviction.* But if that denominates a Man a Heretick, and is therefore a part of the Definition, then the first and second Admonition, which the Apostle advises to, is not the Admonishing of a Heretick, but an Antecedent of his becoming such. If the Apostle had said a Drunkard, after the first and second Admonition rejected, we would have concluded him a Drunkard before Admonition. But what are these proper means, the not hearkening to which, makes him an Heretick? These are Mr. Kiffens Admonition and Mr. Coxes Book. Well now Mr. Col. is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. He is become no Christian, and sinneth; viz. Commits a Work of the Flesh, not called Murther, or Adultery, but Heresie; which is a sin by way of Eminency: for he is condemned of himself. What? in the present Judgment of his conscience? *Perhaps not (say they) how then? Why he is condemned of himself, that is, by his former Profession.* He was formerly of another Opinion than he is now, and so was every man that changes his Opinion; how then shall self-condemning be the Character of a Heretick, more than of one that grows more knowing, wiser and honest? Is this now to follow Scripture strictly, and to exercise necessary Discipline, for prevention of the mischiefs that arise from wicked Opinions? If this be not Tyranny, what is? Its far more destructive and dishonourable to Christian Religion, to make such matters as these Fundamental thereof, and to exclude Consciencious men from the Communion of Christians, and consequently from Eternal life, upon such account, than to bear patiently with them, instructing them. Indeed how can it consist with Common Prudence, for any man that understands what Christian Religion is, or values Liberty and Charity, to list him-
self

self among you? The Church of *England* exercises a Hundred times more Justice and Prudence than this amounts to: Nay you do by this, give them a just occasion against your selves, and all other Non-conformists, for they may find manifold better reasons to Excommunicate you & them, than that you take against Mr. Col. & if they should prosecute you no further than their own Discipline allows, you would think your selves severely dealt with, and cry out of persecution for conscience sake. They need not make (or execute) any Laws against Conventicles, if they would put in strict Execution Church Censures, and proceed to those Censures as rashly and foolishly as you do.

It is you and your Censures, that cause Scandals and disturbances; you subvert Christianity, under pretence of defending it; you call your slight Inventions Fundamentals of Faith, and then for the sake of them, subvert that Love and Communion among Christians, which are Truly Fundamental and Essential to Christianity. Pardon me Sir if I am a little mov'd and warmer than my ordinary Temper allows in the consideration of this matter, which I look upon as so very destructive to the best design of Christian Religion among men, and of liberty among us in these Nations.

I Should now speak of the Persons that have taken upon them this Power, concerning whom I would only call to your mind, that you are the persons that have for conscience sake, departed from the Judgment and Practise of almost all Churches, in almost all Ages of Christianity, (to say no more) in the great Points of Baptizing or not Baptizing the Infants of Believers. You are the men that hold, *That all things whatsoever comes to pass, was before decreed of God*; and consequently, both *Adams* sin and all the sins that ever were or shall be, are caused by God; for Gods Decrees are most Effectual Causes: Suitable to this, you hold it a Fundamental, and it is one of the Heresies you condemn Mr. Col. for, *that he denies that the defilement of our nature is our sin to the second death*: For it can be so no other way, but by Gods imputing it to us for sin or making it so: and so, God is the Author of it not we; and all other sins being the necessary consequents of this, God is the prime cause of them all; and as of their sin, so of the Eternal Damnation that follows them, and shall overtake the far greater part of Mankind, even Infants and Heathens, that could not, or have never heard of Christ or the Gospel by him; if what you say were true. If now you should be dealt with and proceeded against with that rigor and madness, as you proceed against Mr. Col. you should be cast out by those that are of a contrary mind to you, as the very abhorrency of Christians; so abominable are the Genuine Consequences of your Fundamentals. But other Christians consider the weakness of humane understandings, they take your word, when you deny these consequences,

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tho the working of them does too manifestly appear in some Mens lives.

I come now to the ground of Mr. *Kiff, Coxe* and the rest, their Usurping this Power of Judging Mr. *Collier*; but for that and the manner of their proceeding, I may refer you to the Narrative; only there seems to be in these men a strange itch after Dominion and Jurisdiction, that should make them to go a Hundred miles off *London*, to Judge and Punish a Pastor or Minister of another Congregation; one who has not communicated with them (more than with other Congregations) for 20 years together, and that upon this ground, that he did once communicate with a Congregation, which being afterward divided into two parts, Mr. *Kiffin* is a leader of the one part; but may not the other part make as good claim to the Jurisdiction as Mr. K. and whilst they contend about it, what shall become of the power of that Congregation, whereof he has been a Church member this many years? It was pertinently said I confess of *Walter Pen* in the debate of this matter, as I took notice before, That the Church at *London* was the representative of all the Churches in the Nation.

But what then is become of the Independent Discipline of Churches which Mr. *Kiff* and the rest do in their Confession of Faith, so earnestly contend for? They would have no Bishop nor Classical Assembly to have power over them, but if they can draw to themselves a power, they are well content with it, and will take any, the slightest ground of laying claim to it. If Mr. *Col.* had been in necessity and wanted their money to help him, and had sent to them for it, I doubt they would then have refer'd him to his own Society, and have disclaimed him; but the thirst of dominion, and the will of relieving necessity, may be separated in these Church-men, without absurdity: but perhaps it was their zeal against Heresie that carryed them a 100. Miles out of their way to meet with it and condemn it: And if so? Is there not just cause to fear that their zeal might carry them further, if they had an occasion? If zeal transports them to one irregular piece of Usurpation and Injustice, it may to many, as by the cause of their condemning Mr. *Col.* they have consequently condemned all Christians that differ from them in greater, or the like Opinions: So by their grounds and manner of proceeding, they shew, that even their own Rules and Laws, are not sufficient to secure such Dissenters from the heat of their prosecution. And what narrow Souls are these that amidst so many Adversaries on every side, and when the great Enemy of Christian love and liberty, the Roman High Priest is Gaping to devour all, they should manifest so much intemperate heat, and indiscreet animosity one against the other? Thus causing injudicious people to nauseate separate Societies, and to think favourably of Popery it self.

I might observe many things more in this process that are very mischievous to the Profession of True Religion, but I intended only a short Letter, and have already transgressed that intention; therefore I shall break off having shewed my sad relentment of these proceedings: praying you, even for Christs and Religions sake, to consider what has been done, and to use your utmost interest to move these Brethren to repentance, if they be guilty, as they are represented; if not, to undeceive the world, abused by this Narrative; if it be not True.

God grant that the light of Truth and Love, may so shine in the lives of Christs servants before men, that they seeing their good works, may glorify their father, who is in heaven.

Your Affectionate Friend and servant, *J. W.*

FINIS.

